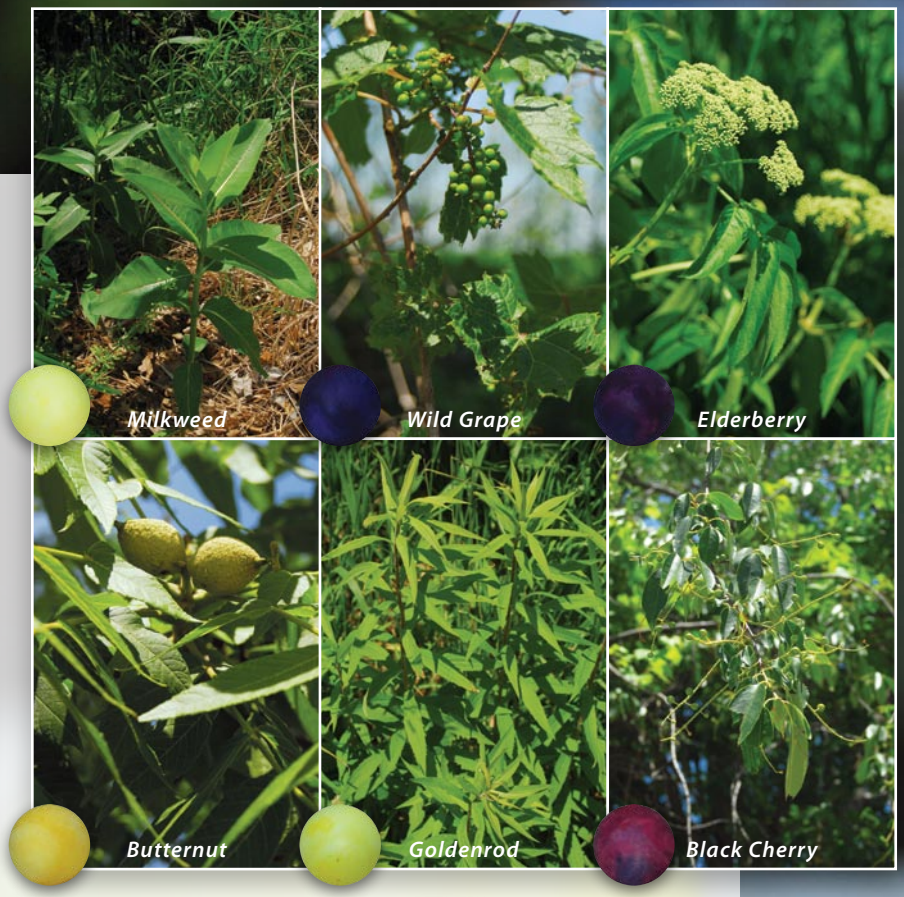
# ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY.

## NATURAL EASTER EGG DYES

Discover a bounty of intense color palettes with easy-to-make natural dyes. In the March/April 2008 issue, we will offer simple steps to color vibrant Easter eggs using these super-intense dyes that outshine store-bought options. Get outside with a friend or loved one to gather plants and brew a tempest of color. The dyes are easily frozen for later use.

Make double batches for other projects, such as tinting fabrics and shirts. (Alum, common in grocery store spice isles, sets colors to prevent running. To stain fabric, add a teaspoon of alum per cup of dye and simmer for 10 minutes).




### HERE'S WHAT TO HARVEST THIS FALL

"You only need a quart of berries," to concoct dye says Winneshiek County naturalist Larry Reis, renown locally for his beautiful hand-made dyes.

Black cherry, elderberry and wild grape berries offer a riot of colors. Search woodlot edges for low-branched black cherry trees to churn out a burgundy red dye. Peep around for elderberries in wetter habitats in low-lying, wild areas to make steel blue-grey colors. Use wild grape berries for royal purple tints. Hike along river bottoms, hedgerows and fencelines to pluck, nibble and gather a quart for dye. (Obtain landowner permission and leave enough berries, nuts and leaves for wildlife.)

TO MAKE: Smash berry types separately, add to a pan with several cups of water and simmer 20-30 minutes to extract pigments. Strain the colorful juice through a triple layer of cheese cloth. Cool and place in a Ziploc bag and freeze. Follow the same procedure for the species below.

Walnut, butternut and hickory create intense chocolate, tan and olive-brown shades. For walnuts, "shuck off the husk, that green yucky part," says Reis. "When they start to decompose they are easier to husk." Use the pigment-rich husks for dye. Green hickory nuts are easier to husk than older nuts. Allow butternuts to sit and ferment to aid husk removal. An ice-cream pails' worth creates 2-3 cups of dye.

Gather an ice-cream pail of cottonwood leaves to produce pale yellow dye. Wild sunflowers make orange-yellow dye. Place whole into water and simmer 30 minutes. Gather a gallon of goldenrod flower plumes for a true lemon yellow dye. Pick a gallon of milkweed leaves to create orange-yellow dye, again steeping 20-30 minutes.

*Watch for our March / April 2008 issue for a look at using your new dyes to color eggs for Easter.*

# PRESSING FAMILY FUN

Why drop $50 on a professional plant press when you can make one at home for next to nothing. Phone books work in a pinch, but you can make a sturdy plant press that will stand up to years of use with scrap wood, newspapers and cardboard. Simply cut two pieces of plywood equal size (12 inches by 12 inches is a handy size). Clamp the boards together and drill a hole in each of the four corners. Place a piece of cardboard, slightly smaller than the wood, on one board, followed by a sheet of folded newspaper or blotting paper and a plant or flower. Place another sheet of newspaper and cardboard on top, and repeat layering until all plant specimens are in place. Place the other piece of wood on top and secure corners with a bolt and wing nut, or use a strap to cinch the pieces tight. Leave undisturbed for at least a week.

Dried plants can be used to dress up an old candle, make an attractive framed picture or used for family crafts. Use a glue stick to secure plant material to work surfaces. Dip or lightly brush a coat of paraffin wax over candles to preserve the plant.

# STEP TO A HEALING TREE

BY TIM LANE

Roger Ulrich, formerly of Texas A&M, found that hospital patients with rooms overlooking trees recovered faster, used fewer painkillers and left the hospital sooner. University of Maryland research shows that workers are sick less and have less job stress when their commute provides a view of trees and their offices have trees outside the windows.

I find that incredible. A few trees can impact health care and thus the national debt, which of course is tied to rising costs of illness.

If a few trees can do that, imagine the impact of a state park where by my scientific calculations there must be a gabillion trees. But if you do head to a park...don't just soak in the view...walk.

If a pill could lower risks for heart attack, diabetes, stroke, osteoporosis and breast and colon cancer while reducing weight, cholesterol, constipation, depression and impotence and increase muscle mass, flatten the belly and reshape thighs while reducing risks of age-related dementia and made you better-looking—with no side effects—it would cost an arm and a leg...except in Canada where it would only cost a leg.

Research shows that walking most days of the week delivers those benefits. Yet the Centers for Disease Control reports around 75 percent of Americans don't get 30 minutes of daily exercise, whether walking or more strenuous sport or recreation. And one-third of us live a sedentary life.

"We used to think that exercise had to hurt, and you had to bleed and throw up to accomplish anything," said Susan Johnson, director of continuing education at the Cooper Institute in Dallas, which studies the link between personal habits and health. "We now know that's not true."

Greg Heath, lead scientist in the CDC's physical activity and health branch, says early in your walk glands secrete adrenaline into your bloodstream and your heart beats faster and causes your blood pressure to go up. The heart pumps more blood away from the chest into limb muscles used to hike trails. Blood vessels in the arms and legs expand as they're fed more nutrients and oxygen by the blood. As your heart rate climbs, you're taking more breaths per minute, increasing oxygen intake 10 times the amount if you are sedentary. As muscles receive more blood, they use stored carbohydrates and sugar starches. Metabolism—the process of converting food to fuel—speeds up. As a result, so does digestion.

By walking 10,000 to 12,000 steps you can control your weight. Walk 2,000 more steps and you can lose weight with a healthy diet. For an average stride, 10,000 steps equals about five miles. Many Iowans get less than 2,500 to 5,000 steps a day.

*"Me thinks that the moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow."*—Henry David Thoreau

*Tim Lane is the fitness consultant with the Iowa Department of Public Health. He is also a marathoner, former director of the National Ski Patrol, climber, volleyball coach and cyclist. He has cycled across America once and Iowa 25 times. He's a regular participant in* RAGBRAI *and developed the* Ride Right *safety program. Tim also helped design and promotes* Lighten Up Iowa.

# But Why?

## *Helping adults answer children's nature questions*

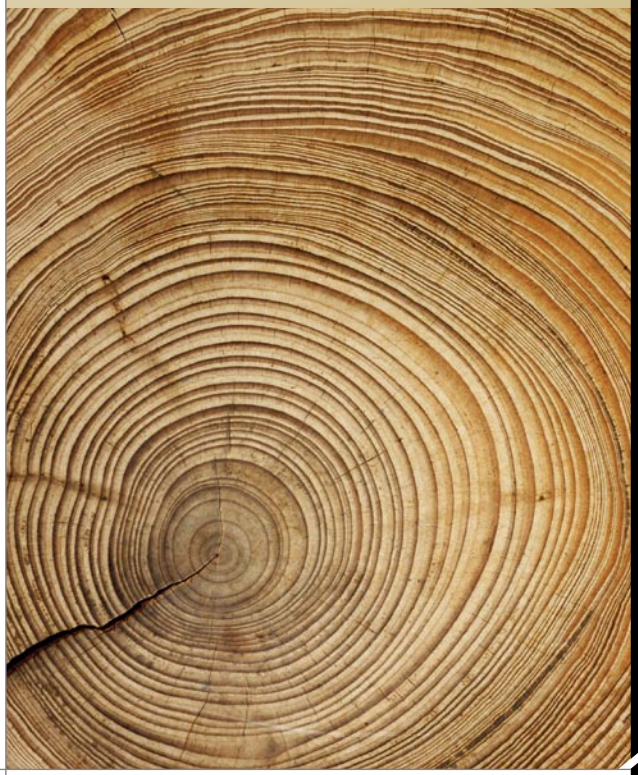
BY A. JAY WINTER

*A. Jay Winter educates up to 20,000 Iowa children each year as the DNR's training specialist at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center.*

***Why do trees have circles in the middle?***
***– ABIGAIL, Age 7***

Those "circles" are called tree rings, also known as growth or annual rings. Aptly named, they are measurements of each year's growing cycle. Within each ring are two layers of wood: springwood, which is lighter in color and indicates wood grown early in the season, and summerwood, which shows late season growth. Springwood rings are wider because growing conditions are typically better early in the season. Both rings must be counted when aging trees.

By studying tree rings (dendrochronology), scientists can tell much more about the tree than just age. They can reconstruct past climate because trees are good environmental indicators. Trees produce small rings in years of drought, larger circles when growing conditions are good. Scientists can also pinpoint the occurrence and frequency of fires by locating ring scarring.



TREE PHOTO BY JAKE ZWEIBOHMER; TREE RINGS BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM